

Committee Substitute for Committee Substitute
for Senate Bill Nos. 1334, 534, and 360

An act relating to school readiness programs; implementing s. 1(b) and (c), Art. IX of the State Constitution; creating the voluntary universal prekindergarten education program; limiting the application of provisions relating to school readiness programs; requiring the State Board of Education to submit a report with recommendations or options for the curriculum, design, and standards of the voluntary universal prekindergarten education program; directing the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability and the Auditor General to conduct audits and submit reports to the Governor and Legislature; providing an effective date.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. Voluntary universal prekindergarten education program.—

(1) The voluntary universal prekindergarten education program shall provide a high-quality prekindergarten learning opportunity in the form of early childhood development and education which is voluntary and free for every child in this state who is 4 years of age. The program must be organized, designed, and delivered in accordance with section 1(b) and (c), Article IX of the State Constitution. Except as otherwise expressly provided by law, sections 411.01-411.011, Florida Statutes, do not apply to the voluntary universal prekindergarten education program.

(2) The State Board of Education shall conduct a study on the curriculum, design, and standards for the voluntary universal prekindergarten education program. By October 1, 2003, the State Board of Education shall submit a report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The Agency for Workforce Innovation and the Florida Partnership for School Readiness shall provide any necessary information and coordinate with the state board. The report must include the recommendations or options of the state board on each of the following program elements:

(a) Curriculum and standards.—Developmentally appropriate curriculum and standards that provide children a high-quality prekindergarten learning opportunity. These curriculum and standards must be designed to:

1. Address and enhance each child's ability to make age-appropriate progress;

2. Provide early childhood development of language and cognitive capabilities;

3. Provide education in basic skills and other appropriate skills; and

4. Deliver early childhood development and education according to professionally accepted standards.

(b) High-quality learning opportunity.—Quality standards that provide children a high-quality prekindergarten learning opportunity. These quality standards must include specific recommendations or options for the expected outcomes of the voluntary universal prekindergarten education program.

(c) Quantity of instruction.—Standards for the quantity of instruction to be provided as voluntary and free for every child in the state who is 4 years of age. These standards must include specific recommendations or options for each of the following elements:

1. Hours per day; and
2. Days per year.

(d) Delivery system.—Standards for providers in order to deliver children a high-quality prekindergarten learning opportunity. These standards must include specific recommendations or options for each of the following elements:

1. Appropriate range of settings, including both public and private providers, with consideration of the capacity in each available setting;
2. Licensing or regulatory requirements for providers;
3. Health and safety requirements for providers; and
4. Parental choice.

(e) Assessment and evaluation.—Methods for measuring the performance of the voluntary universal prekindergarten education program. These methods must include specific recommendations or options for each of the following elements:

1. Assessment of age-appropriate progress for each child;
2. Evaluation of outcome measures for each provider in each setting; and
3. Evaluation of school readiness coalitions.

(f) Funding.—Estimated cost per full-time-equivalent child of the recommended curriculum, design, and standards. This cost estimate must consider funding for each of the state board's recommendations or options for each of the program elements described in this subsection.

(3) The report must also include the state board's recommendations or options for best practices to improve the outcomes of school readiness coalitions and providers.

Section 2. Audits.—

(1) Performance Audit.—The Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability shall conduct a performance audit of the school readiness programs administered by the Florida Partnership for School

Readiness, the Agency for Workforce Innovation, and the school readiness coalitions for fiscal years 2000-2001, 2001-2002, and 2002-2003. The audit shall reassess the implementation, efficiency, and outcomes of the school readiness programs and shall examine the progress achieved by the Florida Partnership for School Readiness and the school readiness coalitions in response to the office's findings and recommendations reported under section 411.01(11), Florida Statutes. The office shall also:

(a) Monitor the study conducted by the State Board of Education on the voluntary universal prekindergarten education program;

(b) Evaluate the ability of the school readiness system to effectively implement the voluntary universal prekindergarten education program based upon the state board's recommendations or options for curriculum, design, and standards for the program; and

(c) Identify modifications or options for the school readiness system necessary to effectively implement the voluntary universal prekindergarten education program.

A report of the audit's findings and recommendations or options shall be submitted to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by January 15, 2004.

(2) Financial and Operational Audit.—The Auditor General shall conduct a financial and operational audit of the school readiness programs administered by the Florida Partnership for School Readiness, the Agency for Workforce Innovation, and the school readiness coalitions for fiscal years 2000-2001, 2001-2002, and 2002-2003. The Auditor General shall also examine compliance with state and federal law and with rules adopted by the Florida Partnership for School Readiness and shall review implementation of the school readiness plans for compliance with the approved plans. A report of the audit's findings and recommendations or options shall be submitted to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by January 15, 2004.

While the audits are being conducted pursuant to this section, local school readiness coalitions shall refrain from initiating new long-term fiscal commitments.

Section 3. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law.

Approved by the Governor June 4, 2003.

Filed in Office Secretary of State June 4, 2003.